

Subject: Trip to Belarus and Russia - 1996

Minsk: October 29-30

Meeting with Ambassador Yalowitz

On October 30 at approximately 12:00 noon we met with Ambassador Kenneth Yalowitz in his office at the American Embassy in Minsk. Present at the meeting were the ARRB delegation, Ambassador Yalowitz, and Political Officer Anne Carson. The Ambassador expressed his keen interest in the Board's activities and his cautious optimism that the Board would receive the same access to the KGB files that Norman Mailer had. The Ambassador recounted his own visit to the Foreign Ministry and with KGB officials in connection with the Board's initial cables last year. He indicated that it was his belief that the Board would be successful in gaining limited access to the materials. It was important, he claimed, that the Board be aware of the general context of U. S./Belarusian relations, which he characterized as not ideal at the present time. He described a recent period of some tension during which he had been the subject of personal attacks. Yalowitz promised that he would follow-up personally on any issues that were raised in our meeting with the KGB. He further promised full support of the embassy for any subsequent visit by the Board.

Meeting with Deputy Minister of Belarusian KGB

Accompanied by Anne Carson, Second Secretary of the embassy in Minsk, and an interpreter, we met with six officials of the Belarusian KGB at the headquarters of the KGB in Minsk. No business cards were exchanged and no formal introductions were

made, so that it is not possible to record the names of the individuals present.

However, we were made aware of the titles of our interlocutors. The leader of the Belarusian delegation was a Deputy Minister, one of two or three. In addition, there was the head of administration for the KGB and members of his staff, including the head of the archives, and the archivist responsible for the Lee Harvey Oswald file. The only named individual in the Belarusian delegation was one Alexey Krayushkin, who was introduced as being with the liaison division.

Tunheim began the meeting with formal greetings and an introduction to the mission and work of the Assassination Records Review Board. The Deputy Minister began his remarks by reviewing the KGB's actions in response to Lee Harvey Oswald. He indicated that the documents collected on Oswald were collected to answer the "major question," that is, whether Oswald was an agent of American intelligence. He indicated that the KGB had suspected this after Oswald's defection and undertook an investigation to determine what Oswald's goals were and what his relationship might have been to American intelligence. The Deputy Minister then turned to the subject of Norman Mailer's access to certain information in the KGB file. He emphasized that Mailer did not receive all the documents and could not receive them because of restrictions in Belarusian law. He suggested that the reason for granting Mailer the limited access that he did receive was based on the "scandalous movie" that appeared around that time period.

The Deputy Minister indicated that the Belarusian KGB had requested that the United States supply certain information regarding U.S. records relating to Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union. He indicated that the U.S. did not comply with this request. He then

turned to the issue of the provisions of Belarusian law that prevented access to the Lee Harvey Oswald files. He admitted that not all records were open and agreed that this was a proper state of affairs. He emphasized that they had to abide by the law and concluded by saying, "Perhaps we are not the generation to investigate the truth in this matter." He meant by this that the records will not be available *in toto* until the next generation. The Deputy Minister reiterated his desire that the U.S. provide all records related to Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union. Jack Tunheim undertook to supply these copies. At this time the Deputy Minister showed us the six volumes of Oswald material, emphasizing again that these documents related only to the issue of whether Lee Harvey Oswald was an agent for American intelligence agencies. He indicated that the methods employed in the investigation were the same that the FBI would employ today and repeated that the result of the investigation was that Oswald had not been an agent. He concluded by saying that there is no evidence at all in the documents that there was any USSR involvement in the crime. The records contain, he noted, intimate information that, under Belarusian law, could not be made public. When we indicated that there was a possibility under our law to redact certain information and to protect names, he countered with the observation that: "You can change a name, but cannot change a life," indicating that there was sufficient information in the document apart from the name of an individual that would lead to his or her identification. At this point the Deputy Minister, pleading a busy schedule, left the meeting and the head of administration for the KGB took over. We were told that a special group was appointed to review the Oswald records and to prepare a report for Parliament about their eventual fate. This special group was made

up of scholars with some background in intelligence (the head of administration was, himself, a member of this group). Their goal was to prepare the records for eventual publication should the Parliament decide that that was the appropriate course. They then went through the six volumes of records which they had in the room with them and described certain key records. For instance, in volume 1 of the files they described the document which resulted in the opening of the investigation and the opening of the file. This was dated 21 December 1959. The document which effectively closed the investigation, and which was reportedly the latest dated document in the file, was dated 16 April 1964 and concluded that Oswald had no connection with U.S. intelligence. The six volumes of records were not organized strictly chronologically, but according to topics.

We inquired about the access that Oleg Nechiporenko received to these records. We were told that Nechiporenko did have limited access to the file. The head of the administration indicated that under normal records retention policies of the KGB these records would be kept until 2009, that is 70 years after the birth of the subject of the file.

However, a decree issued in April of 1964 at the time that the record was officially closed, it was decided that the record should be retained permanently because of the historic value. The head of administration indicated that the expert group that was responsible for the review of the file would respond to specific questions that we posed relating to its content. Jack undertook that we would provide specific questions about Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union with the request that specific answers be prepared on the basis of the Lee Harvey Oswald file.

At this point the discussion turned to the nature of the Belarusian archives access law.

We were told that a new archives law was passed by the Supreme Council in 1993 and 1994. This law had specific provisions about privacy of individuals. We were given a copy of these regulations. According to the regulations, records relating to personal privacy should be closed for 75 years.

Moscow: October 31-November 1

Meeting with Igor Vladimirovich Lebedev

Director “Historico-Documental Department,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs

On November 1, 1996, the ARRB delegation met with representatives of the Foreign Ministry Archives led by Igor Vladimirovich Lebedev. Also at the meeting were an assistant to Lebedev as well as a representative of the FSB, the domestic intelligence service. Following an introduction by Jack Tunheim, Lebedev stressed that it was his belief that all records were important, not only for the Americans but for the Russian public. He indicated that as a contemporary he could clearly remember the atmosphere of tragedy and pain that attended the assassination of President Kennedy. He remarked that his father had been an assistant to Chairman Krushchev at the time and that, when he returned home, Lebedev was able to perceive the level of emotion that his father felt at the news. He believed that the event was most tragic because of what it would mean for Soviet relations. He stressed that the Foreign Ministry would like to share information that they have that would be clearly related to the assassination. He indicated that they had searched their files and had found a few documents of consular nature which he handed over to Jack. Lebedev suggested that that was the extent of the materials held by the Foreign Ministry Archives. In response

to a specific reference that Marwell gave from the Oleg Nechiporenko book, Lebedev admitted that there would be, of course, other materials in the archive but questioned their relevance. We instructed Lebedev on the broad nature of our inquiry, stressing that we were not limiting our efforts to materials that related specifically to the event, but were also interested in materials that would clarify the reaction of the Soviet state and other nations to the assassination. We stressed that materials from diplomatic traffic that would describe the reactions of foreign governments to the assassination would be of interest to us. Lebedev quickly understood the concept of complete and broad relevance. He undertook to be forthcoming in all areas under his jurisdiction, warning at the same time that there were many agencies that might have relevant records that were not under his jurisdiction. Lebedev raised an issue that was clearly related to his cooperation with us. He stressed that cooperating with us would be far simpler if there were an agreement on general matters with his counterpart in the Department of State, and specifically mentioned William Slaney's office at the State Department. We indicated that we would make contact and do what we could to clarify the situation. We also undertook to provide to Lebedev all relevant materials in U. S. files that would bear on the questions of interest to us.

Meeting with Major-General Alexander P. Belozarov

Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)

We then met with Major-General Alexander P. Belozarov from the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. After introductions from our side, Belozarov responded that there are no other documents than those that have already been turned over to the American

side. By “those documents” he meant some 25 records that had been transferred to the U. S. between 1964 and 1995. He was unaware of the specifics of the transfer of these records, but he was adamant that the records had been transferred. He suggested that we deal with representatives of the FSB and the Federal Archives Service to determine the fate of the records. He emphasized that Soviet intelligence had no contact with Lee Harvey Oswald. He stated that Nechiporenko had had meetings with many people involved with the Oswald story and that some documents had been shown to American journalists, presumably Norman Mailer. Belozarov stressed that the archives under his control were purely operational in organization and content and that they likely contained reports filed from foreign posts abroad. He stressed that they had searched everything in the archives and that there was nothing further of interest. Belozarov was unambiguous in his response that there was, in fact, nothing. He indicated that no meant no. The archives under his control are closed; individuals from the general public have no right to access.

Meeting with Vladimir A. Tiuneyev

Acting Head of the Federal Archives Service of Russia

We next met with Vladimir A. Tiuneyev, acting head of the Federal Archives Service of Russia. Also at the meeting were Vladimir Tarasov, head of the International Relations Department, and Vladimir Kozlov, deputy head of the State Archives Service of Russia, as well as several staff members. Following Jack Tunheim’s introduction, Tiuneyev explained the organization of the archives in Russia, indicating that it was a federal system and that it had under its general control the State Archives of the Russian

Federation which included records of the top ministries of the Supreme Soviet as well as Russian State Archives, Central Party Archives, Moscow History Archives, and many other local and regional archives. It became clear that the Federal Archives Service was under the impression that we were a commission designed to solve the crime and not to collect records. They indicated that they would be happy to search their archives in response to specific requests from the Board. In the course of our conversation, a general frustration with the lack of contact with the National Archives in Washington was raised. Tiuneyev stressed that they had agreements with many other national archives, but not with NARA. The specific issue of the Smolenz Archives was raised, as was the frustration that it had not yet been returned. We undertook to provide a list of specific questions and Tiuneyev stressed that they would be responsive to us. He suggested that we contact them directly by fax and gave us his current fax number. We also indicated that we would make contact with the National Archives and raise the issue of contact with the Russian State Archives system and would try to clarify the issue of the Smolenz Archives.